

The Value
of the
Classics Educationally Considered.

Inaugural-Dissertation

for the attainment of the degrees of Doctor of Philosophy

and Master of Arts

at the

University of Rostock

by the

Rev^d. John Denby Harrison

Curate of Emmanuel Church Everton Liverpool.

ROSTOCK.

CHARLES BOLDT'S PRINTING-OFFICE.

1869.

The value of the Latin and Greek Classics in their relation to Education.

The design of education is not merely to store the mind with facts, and theories and speculations, but it is to cultivate the mind itself, and to augment its powers.

In this view therefore, I differ from the ancient sophists, who thought that what was wanted was just to fill the mind, as a cask is filled with water.

The Reverend Mr. Leed has truly observed, „It is necessary to habituate our minds in our younger days to some employment, which may engage our thoughts and fill the capacity of the soul at a riper age.“

Agreeable to this view is the statement of the judicious shooker; „education and instruction“ he says „are the means, the one by use, and the other by precept, to make our natural faculty of reason, both the better and the sooner to judge rightly between truth and error, good and evil.“

If all we do in the work of education is to load the mind, but a very partial result is gained.

What is wanted is to furnish the student with correct taste and judgement, with in fact the means of self education.

„Every man“ says Gibbon „who rises above the common level has received two educations: the first from his teachers, the second, more personal and important from himself. Let him once obtain this second education and then there is scarcely any barrier to his progress in any science to which he may

apply himself, but should he only have the first he will never rise to eminence, and in laps of time it will be forgotten.

Happy is the man who can say with no idle boast with Richter, „I have made as much out of myself as I could with the stuff, and no man should require more.“ This celebrated man not only gained great knowledge but in the acquisition of it he gained wisdom, which was still better.

The question then arises what is the best course to pursue to gain this mental discipline, this higher education, this key to real eminence and success?

Vastness of reading will not give it, for very often it produces no more abiding impression on the mind, than does the ever shifting forms in a panorama upon the eye.

My object in this dissertation is to show, that this end may be best and soonest accomplished by the study of the classics.

It is not pretended, that the classics will alone do all that is required, but that the patient prosecution of classical knowledge is the best training the mind can receive, in order to grasp the various sciences.

I regard the classics as the foundation of the temple of learning, and not, by any means, the temple itself.

Intellectual culture is one thing: a mind stored with complete learning is another. To attain the latter every department of knowledge must be ransacked.

The extensive field of mathematical, metaphysical, and philosophical study must be travelled over and conquered.

Still more closely let us consider the part classical study sustains in disciplining the mind.

None can fail to be aware, both from experience and observation of the many dangers, which beset the path of the student.

One great danger is that of pursuing many objects at one and the same time, like a child running across the green meads, in eager haste after a butterfly, until another should cross his path in a contrary direction, and then leaving off the pursuit of the first to give chase to the second, and continuing to follow it only till a third should appear.

When thus engaged in following one object and another, without any definite purpose, attention is divided and distracted, strength is wasted, without a show of success, and impressions, because numerous and unmatured by time and diligence are transient, and cloy the mind even to sickness, instead of supplying it with nutritious food.

Now no preventive can be more effectual than classical study.

The youth, however tenacious may be his memory, however great may be his natural capacity for language will have to plod hour by hour, and day by day before he has mastered the intricacies of his Latin and Greek Grammars.

When this is done the danger to which at the outset he was exposed may be said scarcely to exist, and he now possesses a purpose resolute to pursue and a capacity broad enough to achieve.

Another similar evil is the hurriedly reading through of a multitude of books.

No mistake can be greater than to suppose that the reading of many books will necessarily make one wise.

In all probability unless such an one is a prodigy in nature, one of those minds, which centuries only produce it will have precisely the opposite effect. It will muddle, stultify and choke the mind.

„Read“ says Bacon, „not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider. Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.“

Ask the gardener, what would be the effect of the excessive crowding together in one bed seeds of every variety and kind?

The words of Carlyle are worthy to be written in letters of gold upon the wall of every study; „It is not“, he said „by books alone, nor by books chiefly that a man becomes in all parts a man.“

I do not by any means affirm that a man can read too many books, when he is ripe for them, and when he has made them his own, in the way described by Bacon. It may perhaps be argued, that this desultory sort of reading was practised by Johnson, that Shakespeare „had small Latin and less Greek“, that Franklin was turned loose upon the world in his youth, dependent upon his own exertions and destitute of classical advantages.

True, but be it remembered that these men rose, not because they did in part without this early preparatory classical discipline, but by the force of their native, heaven born genius.

It were strange indeed, if now and again extraordinary men did not occasionally leap upon the stage of human life, and making light of the beaten tracks did not strike out paths for themselves over rocks and charms, alpine heights and forests before untrod; but woeful would be the fate of all ordinary mortals, who would attempt to follow their erratic example.

The safer course is „to labour and to wait,“ preferring the slower and the steadier way, guided by the land marks of the past.

Many who will not pay the price of thorough mental cultivation have made forsooth the agreeable discovery, that some uneducated men have a deep current of wit and wisdom flowing under their nature.

They have seen; „Rusticus, abnormis sapiens, crassâque Minervâ.“ (Horat. sat. lib. II. 2.)

They profess to fear that the classics will absorb this stream, and therefore they repudiate them. Fatal Error. Allied to the true born philosopher they supply him with maxims, lastes and impulses: they feed the flame of his genius: they incite his latent and unknown powers.

Allied to the true born poet, they chasten his imagination lend him wings for flight, infuse into his soul yearnings after the sublime and beautiful, and lay at his feet wealth resources and materials adequate to give the fullest satisfaction to his highest hopes.

„Doctrina sed vim promovet insitem

Rectique cultus pectora roborant.“

(Horat. Carm. lib. 4. 4.)

How just are the sentiments expressed by a clever, anonymous writer; „What think you“, he asks, gave birth to the clear precise and logical reasonings of Cudworth; the profound thoughts and copious diction of Barrow and Stowe; the transcendent, matchless eloquence of Taylor and Milton? Did they acquire their unrivalled distinction as scholars by studying English literature? Most certainly not; for they had none, or almost none to study.

These were the men who made English literature. Their minds were trained almost wholly by classical study.“

I would advance another step and endeavour to prove that the study of the classics will not only save the student from bad habits, but will also enable him to form good ones. It will enable him to attain concentration of mind.

This is not a natural habit nor attained with little effort. Every one knows, how difficult it is to chain the mind upon a certain subject, hour after hour; to do this at any time, so as to be able to gain an equal amount of profit within any given period.

How often it will roam, following its own vagaries and idle speculations, brooding over its own fancies and transporting us in a moment to the ends of the earth!

Dr. Johnson says: „Every man who has instructed others can tell how much patience it requires to recall vagrant inattention, to stimulate stuggish indifference and to rectify misapprehensions. In order to grapple successfully with the difficulties of science, the mind should be brought to the task in a collected and unruffled state. No half subdued gust of passion should start up; no melancholy train of thought should pour in its muddy current; no sudden start of skittish fancy should come in to ruffle the smooth surface. The whole mind should be a mirror of thought, whose every image should be definite and without distortion“.

And what can more effectively do this than the study of the classics?

Here not a step can be taken without the knowledge of each word, which has to borne in mind in its separate state, until patiently turned out in the lexicon.

Not only has each word to be understood, but all its shades of meaning, and its particular signification in connexion with other words.

It is often moreover, necessary to know the circumstances and peculiar situation in which the author was placed, the times and place in which he lived. Nay, more than this, to understand him aright his class of mind his mode of thinking, his habits of life must often be understood. In addition to these there must often be an acquaintance with the geography of the country, the commerce, politics and social habits of the people.

All this patient range over so vast a field of knowledge must be taken to understand a single writer.

How would it be possible thus to study without acquiring the habit of patient investigation and critical analysis?

„The power of making nice distinctions and separating things that differ“, says Professor Stewart, „is one of the most important powers ever possessed and acquired by the human mind.“ I must believe the linguistic study, directed as it ought to be — namely to acquire a knowledge of things that are designated by the words of a foreign language — is one of the most important means of improving and strengthening the faculty of nice discrimination, that is within the reach of a young man“. Another habit, the study of the classics will induce, is that of close and sound reasoning.

The power of logical reasoning is perhaps the most difficult to acquire, and it implies the greatest maturity of intellect and it moreover follows, other things being equal, that he will reason best whose knowledge is the most extensive.

Mathematical studies afford the best scope for the reasoning faculties when these faculties are developed; but for the same reason, that it would be improper to offer

strong meat instead of milk to a child, so it would be to force the undisciplined mind into mathematical studies. Mathematical reasoning alone admits of absolute certainty; it proves incontestably, that such a thing is certainly right, or certainly wrong; but in our conduct in life we have to draw conclusions from probable evidence, and these conclusions, which influence our course of action, and our relations to others are necessarily of the gravest importance.

For proof and illustration, that man do act, and are obliged to act upon probable evidence, I would wish the student to refer to Bishop Butler's analogy.

It is therefore of the utmost importance that the classics should be studied, both to prepare the mind for the higher mathematical studies, and also to enable it to form right conclusions from probable evidence.

Who knows not the ambiguity of language, and that each one is obliged to assign to every word he hears or reads its proper signification according to the sense in which the author uses it?

It is the province of the classics to enable the student to gain proficiency in this useful word. „The mind“, says Professor Stewart, „in following any train of reasoning beyond the circle of mathematical sciences, must necessarily carry on along with the logical deduction expressed in words, another logical process of a far nicer and more difficult nature, that of fixing with a rapidity which escapes our memory, the precise sense of every word which is ambiguous, by the relation in which it stands to the general scope of the argument.“

In the study of a foreign language what opportunity is offered for right judgement, nice discrimination, the deli-

cate weighing of probabilities. The reasoning faculties of the mind are thus strengthened by their active dealings with language, which is the instrument of all ratiocination. „The real way“ observes a wise man „to gain time in education, is to lose it, that is, to give it up to the natural development of the faculties: not to be in haste to construct the edifice of knowledge but first to prepare the materials and lay deep the foundations. The time that is yielded to the mind for unfolding itself, thought slowly, is not lost; but to derange its natural progress by forcing on it premature instruction, is to lose not only the time spent, but much of the time to come. Give your pupil memory, attention, judgement, taste; and believe me, whatever his vocation in life may be, he will make more rapid and certain proficiency, than if you had loaded him with knowledge, which you cannot answer for his bringing to any result, and which his organs, weak and variable and his unconfirmed faculties are as yet little able to bear.“

In translating a work the student is obliged to bring to bear upon it much common sense, an amount of careful analysis, a mind free from passion and prejudice; and these are the very elements, that reason requires in her province of distinguishing truth from error.

The study of the classics is of the greatest use in strengthening the memory. I think none will be disposed to question the value of a good memory.

Aristotle calls it „the scribe of the soul,“ and Bernard „the stomach of the soul.“ Cicero in speaking of the value of a good memory to an orator says: „Quid dicam de thesauro rerum omnium, memoria? Qua nisi custos inventis cogitatisque rebus et verbis adhibeatur, intelligimus omnia

etiamsi praeclarissima fuerint in oratore peritura. (De oratore lib. 1. 5.)

For accuracy of judgement a good memory is indispensable, otherwise through imperfect knowledge and incorrect data erroneous judgment would follow.

I would not, however recommend, that the memory should be overloaded and overstrained: by getting every thing off by rote the memory itself would not only be placed under too great a pressure and debilitated; but it would be also to the injury of the other mental faculties. The object therefore to be sought is to train the memory to a healthy activity, in cooperation with reason and judgment.

There is nothing I am aware of that will do this so completely as the acquisitions of the words and grammatical forms of new languages.

It will expand if not create memory: it will render it docile and obedient to the will: it will give it health and vigour: it will supply it with the best and richest materials.

I would also advocate classical study on the ground of its beneficial and chastening effect upon the imagination and taste.

It is generally admitted that the younger, and the more uneducated the mind is the stronger is the imagination.

It is for this reason children are the fondest of story books and tales of adventure, that their dreams are the most disturbed by visions of robbers and of mysterious horror. Where does superstition most abound?

Is it not amongst the most ignorant peasantry of those countries, where nature has been the most lavish of her treasures, and where their imaginations have been insensibly cultivated uncontrolled by disciplinary measures? What

applies to individuals applies also to nations, and so nearly all critics are agreed, that the ancients excelled in poetry and imagination. Lord Macaulay, with whom our opinion coincides says, „as civilization advances poetry must necessarily decline“.

This age is one for theories and generalization and personified attributes; men have now got so high up, and the range of their vision has so proportionately widened, that they can but take a birds eye view of things.

This is of course on the supposition that they are in pace with their times. I would therefore recommend, in order to refine and chasten the imagination, the study of the classical works of the early poets. They will supply taste to those whose minds are the most mechanical and sterile.

When once a deep familiarity with the early poets and natural orators is obtained, a perceptible benefit will be felt, which can never afterwards be lost. Memory indeed may prove treacherous and every word may be forgotten; but there will be left „an intellectual residuum“ a mental precipitate which will be of priceless value, and which like the fabulous philosophers stone will turn every thing to gold.

The classics possess other advantages, in addition to that inestimable one, of training and disciplining the mind.

They have an immense influence upon success in life.

How many have had to regret that their vocabulary was not of a better order?

By choice and fitly spoken words it is possible to speak the most offensive truths to men, without wounding their vanity, or incurring their hatred.

„I have known men“ says South „grossly injured in their affairs, depart pleased, at least silent, only because

they were injured in good language, ruined in caresses, and kissed while they were struck under the fifth rib."

The men who have not received this classical education can easily be detected, both in their speech and style of writing. Clever they may be in other respects, nay very clever, yet destitute of this, they will have occasion to deplore their loss to the day of their death.

So our Great Stephenson felt: in one of his speeches he tells us, that feeling how deficient he was in education, he resolved that his son should not labour under his disadvantages, and so in order to provide him with a liberal education, he set to work to mend clocks and watches, after his daily toil was over.

Without a knowledge of Latin it would be impossible to arrive at a complete knowledge of the English language; of Chemistry, the names of the elements being in Latin; and of Medicine.

Aristotle recommends those that study Politics first to examine and understand, what has been written by the ancients upon government, the same advice I would give to all who would wish to attain any eminence in any learned pursuit.

Milton in his „Tractate on Education“ sketches out a plan of study to occupy nine years, from twelve to one and twenty, which though by no means entirely, are yet in the main to be devoted to classical studies.

He recommends Cebes, Plutarch and other Socratic discourses; two or three books of Quintilian; the authors of agriculture, viz, Cato, Varro and Columella; the historical physiology of Aristotle and Theophrastus; then Vitruvius, Seneca's natural questions, Mela, Celsus, Pliny and Solinus.

Having, in addition to these, named and recommended for study the best Latin and Greek books for Ethics, Law, Poetry and Oratory he proceeds thus; „From hence and not till now will be the right time of forming them to be able writers and composers in every excellent matter, when they shall thus be fraught with an universal insight into things. Or whether they will be to speak in Parliament or Council, honour or attention would be waiting on their lips. There would then also appear in pulpits other visages, other gestures and stuff otherwise wrought than what we now sit under, oftentimes to as great a trial of our patience as any other that the preach to us. These are the studies wherein our noble and our gentle youth ought to bestow their time in a disciplinary way from twelve to one and twenty, unless they rely more upon their ancestors dead than themselves living“.

But if success in life would be given them by these means, the Happiness they would derive from such broad and deep learning would be beyond all expression.

They would possess an intimate knowledge of objects totally unknown to the uneducated, and in each one of these objects, they would discover qualities of the most agreeable nature, or at least affording them delight of some kind.

The truly educated have their attention and affections divided among a multiplicity of objects, and though their aggregate pleasures are more numerous, yet they are more complicated and refined.

The ignorant on the other hand are carried to the greatest lengths by smallest matters.

The time has gone by to assert, that man were happier in ignorance. The aged tell us, indeed about the good

old times, when people destitute of educational advantages were happy and uncomplaining. It will always however, be found that such times are more remote, than they are said to be, no matter how far you go back, you must go back still earlier; every age speaks of a golden age that is past, but no age can be found to have realized it.

Men who are uneducated are in fact embriated and the biting sarcasm which Tacitus bestows upon the Germans applies to them; „*Securi adversus homines, securi adversus deos, rem difficilimam assecuti sunt, ut illis ne votò quidem opus sit*“ — (*De moribus Germaniae*).

Even the most elementary education invests its possessor with new powers and he begins to experience those great achievements over space, and time, and death, which are so beautifully and eloquently described by Euripides.

If this be so, how God like the man who has his finger, if such were possible, on all that man ever knew.

I cannot think that the advantages attendant upon classical education are confined to this present short life. The deeper insight man obtains into the kingdoms of God's grace and providence, the more, I think, will he revere that August Being, whose judgments are insearchable and ways past finding out.

Nor can I think, if his moral culture be in any degree proportionate to his mental, that in a future state of existence, those years of patient toil and discipline will be lost.

Let me now notice some of the most current objections against the classics.

It will not be necessary for me to repeat, what I have already said in answer to the objection, that talent can do as well, and possibly better without, than with them.

Nor shall I stop lengthily to refute the silly statement, that men ought not to be highly educated because it increases their power of misleading their fellows.

It is enough to say in reply, that men ought to be educated in order that they may not be led away by designing men. The practical utility of the classics has been called in question.

Why, asks the merchant, or the farmer should he waste his time in studying the dead languages.

It is a matter of great surprise to find a man like Locke offering the same objection.

He says: „Let none waste their time in attempting to acquire a knowledge of Latin, but such as are designed for some of the learned professions, or for the life of a gentleman.“

I would reply, what parent knows, what part God has marked out for his child to sustain in life? How many by a conjunction of circumstances, by a sudden turn of the wheel of providence are called late in life to enter upon a new course of action? I have however sufficiently in the above pages replied to this objection, by proving that the main benefit of the classics consists in the mental discipline and development they afford. But do they not also give the most valuable information? Do they not reveal the mental habits, and character of nations, their progress in history, in morality, in science, in philosophy? Do they not supply an exact chronology to us, together will the history and description of their public institutions? May not the progress of a people, mentally and morally be traced in their vocabulary taken at different periods of time?

I cannot altogether agree with the views expressed by John James Rousseau in his *Emilius*.

He is quite right in thinking, that we ought to watch and second the designs of nature without anticipating her. „As the tree blossoms, the flowers blow and the fruit ripens each at a certain period.“ He would on this theory postpone the work of education until a certain period, forgetting that from the earliest infancy the child begins to reason, and is in fact, however slight in degree a rational and moral being.

The earlier in my judgement you begin with the classics the better, guarding of course against injudiciously straining the child's mind.

It is objected against the classics, that they are irreligious, and that their mythology is immoral. It must of course be conceded that they are the works of pagan writers; but if their writings are not to be studied for this reason, neither must any of their other works, such as those of statuary and architecture.

None can doubt that however erroneous was their theology, yet that they themselves were filled with the deepest reverence for their divinities. To their displeasure they piously attributed all their disasters, such as war famine and pestilence.

It has been forcibly asked, „why was Mezentius Condemned?“ The significant answer is, that it was because he was „Contemptor Divum.“

Has ever any one become a heathen by reading the classics, or made eager to shed blood by reading of the struggles of Thermopylae, Marathon and Salamis.

Take the classics for what they are, and the surprise must be, that they abound in such deep piety, that they do not in a greater measure, and more frequently transgress the bounds of moral propriety.

I hesitate not to say, that taken as a whole the classics are much purer than modern literature.

I conclude by observing that the objections for the most part come from those, who will not give themselves the trouble of unlocking the difficulties connected with the classics.

Yet these difficulties are not so insuperable as at first sight they seem.

Professor Stewart speaking of the acquisitions of Hebrew and Greek observes; „I might safely promise a good knowledge of Hebrew and Greek to most men, if they would diligently improve the time, that they now absolutely throw away in the course of three or four years.“

How much at any rate might be done, if but half the application of the immortal Poet Milton was possessed.

„In winter“ he says „often ere the sound of any bell wakes man to labour or devotion: in summer as oft with the bird that first rouses, or not much tardier to read good authors, or to cause them to be read till attention be weary, or memory have its fell fraught; then with a clear and generous labour, preserving the bodily health and hardiness to render lightsome, clear and not lumpish obedience to the mind, to the cause of religion and to our country's liberty.“



